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# The Forgotten Caste of the Quadroon in Nineteenth Century Literature

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The Forgotten Caste of the Quadroon in Nineteenth Century Literature

**Introduction**

George Washington Cable wrote *Tite Poulette* in 1874, looking back to the beginnings of the conditions that allowed the perpetuating cycle of white men taking a quadroon mistress. At the beginning of the nineteenth century in New Orleans, people with three-quarters white blood and one-quarter black blood was recognized as a quadroon. During this time, the formalities of the quadroon experience began to form and shift from the old jovial mixture of social class and race throughout New Orleans' nightlife to the more Americanized socially governed set of practices. In his important story, Cable writes a very realistic depiction of the life of a free person of color, particularly women who were considered quadroon and octoroon, a person who is seven-eighths white and one-eighth black. Cable's racially charged subject matter for his short story leads many critics and scholars to believe that Cable pursued an agenda for equality amongst races. Although later in his lifetime, in 1885, after he moved to the North, Cable did publish a piece entitled, "The Freedman's Case in Equity" that calls for a recognition of racial equality in America, there is little evidence that this is his aim when writing *Tite Poulette*.

During my extensive research on George Washington Cable, I found a never before published foreword to *Tite Poulette* written in Cable's handwriting. This

foreword and its contents have never been explored in any scholarship on Cable and its contents help unveil Cable's true intentions for *'Tite Poulette*. As a deeply religious man, Cable condemned much of the New Orleans' social sphere. He took issue with the unchristian and morally aghast practices surrounding the union of quadroons and white men that took place at weekly assemblies called quadroom balls. Only quadroom or octoroon free women of color and white men were allowed to attend these balls. The virtually inevitable consequences of quadroom balls included taking a lover out of wedlock, the alcoholic debauchery at the balls, and the violence and duels. Cable heavily sympathized with the white woman's view of quadroons and felt that they were wronged by the very existence of quadroom balls. For this reason, he did not condone the relationships of white men and quadroons through the practice of placage, the formal courtship practices that took place at these balls. These themes are highlighted in the forward he wrote for *Tite Poulette*. He sympathizes with its impact on white women, inciting the long suffering of 'the mothers, wives, and sweethearts' of the men who attended these balls.

Additionally, Cable was a friend and correspondent to Grace King, writer and historian from New Orleans. The two share similar viewpoints regarding the quadroom existence, based on Cable's *'Tite Poulette* and its foreword and King's recounting of the free people of color's history in New Orleans in her book, *New Orleans: The Place and the People*. In this book, King wholly condemns quadroom women in romantic engagements with white men but commended their efforts to establish the Sisters of the Holy Family, which Cable also acknowledges religions an acceptable social sphere for quadroons to coexist unthreateningly with whites. In 1881, the Sisters of the Holy Family

eventually acquired the Salle D' Orleans, the ballroom infamously known for their quadroon festivities, and re-established it under religious values to help quadroon women, an act that received great praise from Grace King:

It was after the civil war that the sisters received the impetus of a new life, and felt the true prophetic bidding of the vocation that first sent them into service. Such a wave of want and misery from their own race rolled in upon them, that they battled merely to keep head above it...In 1881 they felt the ground under their feet once more, and looking up saw the promise of a new era dawning upon them. The old Orleans street ball-room was in the market for sale. They bought it (350)

Both King and Cable feel most comfortable with quadroon women aligning with religion rather than improper romantic connections with white men to ingratiate and elevate themselves into the highest social caste.

In order to fully grasp the social conditions that allowed the practice of quadroon balls then one must look back towards the European beginnings of New Orleans, the Louisiana Purchase, and the slow transition to Americanization, the time in which Cable set *'Tite Poulette*. Although, most scholarship suggests that *'Tite Poulette* is set in the time that it was written, there are numerous indications within the text that it takes place closer to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As well as Cable's forward, which makes clear that he is looking towards the past when he writes, "One must remember that at the time the scenes of this story were laid, that marriage between whites and colored was forbidden by law." The first chapter of this paper will lay out the relevant history necessary to understand the quadroon's position in New Orleans leading up to the time the story took

place, including how the free people of color population in New Orleans formed and how quadroon balls came to fruition.

Next, the social atmosphere of Cable's time in New Orleans will be considered through the historical account of quadroons' existence in New Orleans through the pen of Grace Elizabeth King, writer and friend of George Washington Cable. Her perspective allows for a much more extensive view of a likeminded individual to Cable and how a free person of color was recognized. An extensive overview of Grace King's chapter, "The Convent of the Holy Family" not only lends for more understanding of many of the points Cable addresses in his foreword, but also provides a rare first account perspective of this subject from the point of view of a white woman. Throughout the nineteenth century, white women protested quadroon balls because it put them in direct competition with free women of color; for their male counterparts often chose to attend quadroon balls over white balls and, sometimes, continued to carry on their relationship with their quadroon mistress even after marriage to a white woman.

Then, we will consider George Washington Cable's mindset and foreword written to help contextualize the attitude towards free people of color within *'Tite Poulette*. Cable's religious upbringing provided a solid Protestant foundation in which he staunchly upheld these morals as the basis to live his life by and the bar to which he held all of those around him. These stood in stark contrast to the more relaxed Europeanized Catholic traditions that lay in the foundation of New Orleans' society from the previous French and Spanish rule. The coupling of understanding Cable's deeply religious mindset with the ideals he presents in his foreword to *'Tite Poulette* help highlight the issues he addresses throughout the story.

Finally, I will analyze Cable's *Tite Poulette* and its reinforcement of forwarding American ideals founded in Presbyterianism and stricter social guidelines on the basis of race versus the leftover relaxed social laws from the Europeans. Cable presents a story of a quadroon mother, Madame John, and octoroon daughter, 'Tite Poulette, navigating the social world of New Orleans during the time when quadroon balls thrived. Madame John represents a quadroon who must rely on entertaining at quadroon balls to provide for her and her daughter and is perpetually worried for her daughter's future. 'Tite Poulette acts as a young octoroon woman who tries to balance the social expectations of being an octoroon and her strong moral beliefs. Their neighbor, Kristian Koppig, is a man who disapproves of interracial relations until he meets 'Tite Poulette and begins to question his beliefs and morals on the subject. Madame John embraces the prospect of potentially uniting Koppig and 'Tite Poulette because then her daughter's future would be secure. Eventually, Madame John concocts a plan to pass 'Tite Poulette off as white, rather than racially mixed, in the hope that 'Tite Poulette can pass into the white realm and legally marry Koppig without issue. Cable's depiction of Madame John presented her to a national audience as reinforcing the widely disapproved characteristics quintessential to a quadroon woman at the time. Cable highlights the immoralities associated to her position and how it impacts other characters within the story. His pious beliefs offer sympathy towards the scandalous position that the quadroon woman found herself in yet condemned her for perpetuating the social practice of aligning with a prominent white man, as described by James Robert Payne, "Cable was poised between a growing ethical sense that the racial system was unjust and his own 'mixed' personal feelings toward African Americans" (7).

Throughout the nineteenth century, New Orleans existed with one of the largest populations of free people of color and acted as an example of an American city that socially integrated blacks and whites. Although these liberalities became more constricted as the century grew older and the founding European ideology began to fade. These liberalities disappeared quickly for free men of color, as Floyd Chueng notes, “During French and Spanish rule from 1718 to 180, wealthy free men of color held a relatively large amount of prestige, but their power quickly waned in the face of an American social and legal system that associated their dark skin color with inferiority and yet feared them as leaders in a potential abolitionist movement” (6). However, free women of color held onto their powerful social position throughout the nineteenth century through romantic relations with white men. Their role in interracial relations, specifically at quadroon balls, developed an infamous international reputation. In a sense, New Orleans operated as a microcosm for racial relations to come in 20<sup>th</sup> century America. For it helps predict that no matter how much African Americans integrated themselves into American society, they would never be able to escape the label of “black” as being wholly different from “white.”

### **Chapter One: A Brief History of Quadroons in New Orleans**

The free people of color population in New Orleans has a complicated history during the nineteenth century, in which their social power and prominence ebbed and waned while they struggled to integrate into American society. To begin, people of color within New Orleans, free or slave, fell on a racial scale denoting the amount of Caucasian blood. The precedent was set in 1732 when a document cites six free persons of Color

and specifically identifies them as “mulatre(sse), a label indicating racially mixed parentage” (Martin, 60). It is believed this distinction occurred because the founding men of New Orleans wished to distinguish their offspring, whose mothers were likely women brought from the West Indies. This distinction and classification of mixed race begins to frame the hierarchy of the racial caste system to come in New Orleans. The intricate tracking of one’s racial makeup began to divide the black population, creating a hierarchy of black to white, and perpetuated the white dominance of the city. This caste system was not exclusive to free people of color and even slaves’ privileges depended on where one fell within this spectrum. As found in colonial and antebellum records, taken from Gary Mills’ book, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* the classifications are as follows:

Negro ... applied to usually one of full negro blood

Sacatra ...  $\frac{7}{8}$  Negro –  $\frac{1}{8}$  white

Griffe ...  $\frac{3}{4}$  Negro –  $\frac{1}{4}$  white

Mulatto ...  $\frac{1}{2}$  Negro –  $\frac{1}{2}$  white

Quadroon ...  $\frac{1}{4}$  Negro –  $\frac{3}{4}$  White

Octoroon ...  $\frac{1}{8}$  Negro –  $\frac{7}{8}$  White

In emphasizing a systematic racial distinction for the population of Louisiana, a subsequent caste system began to emerge to properly distinguish people within this diverse community. Unfortunately, this reinforced the hierarchy of whites on top and blacks on the bottom, as Mills notes in his book,

Just as the white entertained feelings of superiority to Negroes, so did

Louisiana’s *gens de couleur libre*. Often possessing more white blood than



black, and quite often on good terms with and publicly recognized by their white relatives, most members of this third caste in Louisiana were reared to believe that they were a race apart from the blacks, who occupied the lowest stratum of society (xiv)

As a result of this mindset, oftentimes, those interracially mixed found themselves in a difficult position, never being fully acknowledged and accepted in the white realm or the black. This recognized superiority for those who possessed more 'whiteness' allowed for more economic opportunities for free people of color, as well as better treatment amongst whites and Mill purports, "this third class in Louisiana advanced socially, economically, and politically to a level unknown among nonwhites in North American society" (xiv). However, after the Louisiana purchase in 1803, the doctrines under which free people of color began to become construed by those in Louisiana began to shift and become more Americanized.

During European rule, balls were public and people from all social classes attended, from slaves to prominent whites. The boundaries between race and class did not permeate the social sphere of the ever-popular masked balls in the early years of development when the first public ballroom opened in 1792. Arthur Kmen, whose chapter "The Music of New Orleans" resides in Hodding Carter's *The Past as Prelude: New Orleans*, cites that the masks provided protective anonymity of any person, "a stranger could ask a lady to dance and not be refused. Neither birth, wealth, nor color made any difference" (213). The Louisiana Purchase ignited concerns amongst the residents in New Orleans and their beloved ballrooms. The people of New Orleans staunchly upheld their love for dancing and the new American leaders acknowledged this

passion. William C. C. Claiborne was the first non-colonial governor of Louisiana and supervised the transfer of Louisiana from French to American control. He stresses in a letter to James Madison, who at the time held position of Secretary of State, that the most pressing concern for the people of New Orleans was allowing ballrooms to continue operating. In a show of solidarity, Claiborne began to attend balls himself to alleviate worries within New Orleans. However, Americans were not as comfortable with the social freedoms amongst all races in New Orleans, and soon the balls became more exclusive and socially defined.

The first formal quadroon ball in New Orleans occurred in 1805, just two years after the Louisiana Purchase, as advertised by Auguste Tessier for “white men and free colored women only” (Kmen, 214). As previously acknowledged, balls had been held for free people of color since the beginnings of the first public ballrooms, however, the distinction of only certain men from a particular class and only certain women of a particular class drastically changes the implications of this ball. The first 1805 quadroon ball was an instant success and soon many ballrooms around the city held Quadroon balls a few times a week. White women quickly grew to resent these balls, as Kmen explains, “the quadroon balls became so popular, in fact, that they cut seriously into the supply of white male dances – to the detriment of the white balls. Men who began their evening at a white ball had a habit of slipping away to a quadroon ball at the first opportunity, leaving the white ladies short of partners and tempers” (214). Kmen’s assessment shows the clear enthusiasm that the white male suitors displayed to the quadroon women of New Orleans and this shift that emphasizes the attendance of quadroon balls is significant in

the reordering of the racial caste system in New Orleans. It also puts the white woman in direct competition with those of mixed race.

This new emerging system, demonstrated through the understanding and importance of quadroon balls in New Orleans society, exhibits the social change for quadroon men and women that took place post Louisiana Purchase. In the time before the Louisiana Purchase, quadroons and free people of color held a respected position in New Orleans society with significant power, wealth, and authoritative roles. However, with the establishment of quadroon balls and its dissociation with men of color, free men of color slowly lost a feasible place in society and free women of color became more aligned with the role of a mistress to a white man, with few other options. Quadroon balls serve as a recognition between the relations of whites and blacks, however, constructs a more narrowly confined role for a free women of color's position in society and their reliance on white men.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the ratio of white men to white women was two to one, this resulted in many white men turning to free women of color as a partner of choice. Quadroon balls quickly became a space to actively pursue "placage" between white men and quadroon women. Placage is simply defined by Joan Martin in *The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color*, as "the practice that existed in Louisiana (and other French and Spanish slaveholding territories) whereby women of color – the option of legal marriage denied them – entered into long-standing, formalized relationships with white European men" (58). Although placage began in the time before the Louisiana Purchase, it wasn't until after New Orleans came under American rule that the term 'quadroon balls' was coined and this loose social system became a concrete

practice in New Orleans society even after the ratio of white women began to even out. Since white men were not expected to marry until their early 30s during this time, they would often take up a quadroon mistress. In exchange, typically, the white man would support the girl and her mother, provide residence, and give his name to any offspring produced.

Marriage between a quadroon and a white man was not allowed and punishable by law, however, this changed for a brief period in the late nineteenth century from 1868-1888, during the time in which Cable writes *Tite Poulette*. Oftentimes, the placage contract would abruptly end after the white suitor found his appropriate social match, a white woman, to marry, or he would continue to see her in the act of adultery. As a result of this system, white women highly disapproved of quadroon balls and many wives accurately accused their husbands of secretly attending these balls. There was little room for quadroon women to stray from this path and it became custom for quadroons to raise their daughters with the same expectations. Needless to say, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this social custom sent ripples through the civilized world and New Orleans grew infamous for its lax proprieties and this made particular groups in the city quite perturbed as a result.

## **CHAPTER 2: Grace King's Account of Quadroons**

Hidden away in a chapter entitled, "The Convent of the Holy Family," Grace Elizabeth King demonstrates a vast knowledge of the social and cultural workings of the racial caste system within New Orleans. King writes this in 1895, which lends an interesting and poignant perspective particularly on social changes from the distinct

European mindset within Louisiana, making references to the *ancien régime*, to the adaptation of an American one and how it affected Louisiana inhabitants. King examines the development of this caste system and the response from both white and black communities. Through King's lens, we are offered a rare view of a 19<sup>th</sup> century white woman examining the social repercussions of the racial caste system and its impacts over the last one hundred years. While King's tone cannot be read as absolutely neutral, considering the time period, it is clear that in this chapter, King pays homage to this diverse community and its achievements, namely the creation of the Convent of the Holy Family, however on the other hand, bitterly condemns quadroons' actions related to quadrone balls. In order to adequately understand, King walks the reader through the introduction of this caste system to New Orleans and supplies an extensive knowledge and history of their development and assimilation into the distinctly New Orleans culture.

This history begins during the *ancien régime* with a notable distinction regarding the correct classification of black people at that time. Those who were entirely African were referred to only as "negro," and never coloured, unlike the *gens de couleur*, both free men and slaves with white ancestry in their genes, as King describes them:

The *gens de couleur*, colored people, were a class apart, separated from and superior to the negroes, ennobled, were it by only one drop of white blood in their veins. The caste seems to have existed from the first introduction of slaves. To the whites, all Africans who were not of pure blood were *gens de couleur*. Among themselves, however, there were jealous and fiercely guarded distinctions; mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, griffes, each term meaning one more generation's elevation, one degree's

further transfiguration in the standard of racial perfection; white blood (333).

These racial classifications are known to have been of importance to the African community, however, King implies that this distinction is not important to the white community and they do not subscribe to these terms. This is an interesting aspect of King's version of this history, seeing as the white community has used these distinctions as we see mentions of it in the census and other government records dating to 1788, as King references in her following paragraph. However, it is insisted that whites did not make the same distinction and this seems to misappropriate white society's importance on this caste system.

Grace King reasons that due to the introduction of Christianity, the African Americans at the time strove to reach religious purity and naturally associated God with the white man and the devil as black. In this way, King insinuates that this influences the staunch race categorizations upheld in the black communities, "Crudely put, to the black Christian, God was a white man, the devil black; the Virgin Mary, the Saviour, the saints and angels, all belonged to the race of the master and mistress; white, divinized; black, diabolized. Is it necessary to follow, except in imagination, the infinite hope, the infinite struggle, contained in the inference?" (334). In this vein, the situation in which both "negros" and "gens de couleur" suddenly found themselves immersed in a white dominated world where the difference of a drop of blood would not only raise their social status, but also their religious purity.

King moves on to cover how Africans ingratiated themselves into this new culture impressively fast,

“The evolution of these barbarians into skilled labourers and Christian men and women was miraculously rapid; a generation sufficing to overlap centuries of normal development, to differentiate succeeding *brut* arrivals [first cargoeers, as they were called, going through their first rudiments of religion, language, and civilized training] in the colony from one another by degrees of superiority and progress, mentally and physically, which can only be tabulated by using, as the negroes themselves did, shades of colour as expressions of measurement” (336).

Based on the mindset just described, Africans and their mixed race offspring could elevate themselves in white people’s eye by assimilating into their culture and attitude. Likewise, whites interpreted the development of Africans’ civility based on this association of whiteness, both in looks and in manners; however those of mixed race, no matter the wealth or appearance, could never attain acceptance as simply a white man or woman. The elevation of the mixed race social class caused early recognition from Spanish Governor Miro, who at one point, attempted to forbid quadroon and ‘mullatress’ women from wearing jewels and plumes, and asserted that these women must wear a kerchief over her hair, in addition, Miro condemned their own nightly assemblies as well. However, these doctrines were never enforced, largely because white men enjoyed the company of these women, and according to King, even less attention was paid to the laws when a “large influx of free *gens de couleur* [came] into the city, a class of population whose increase by immigration had been sternly legislated against” (342), whose own customs had a “softer climate, a more luxurious society, and a different civilization” (342). This new influx took to New Orleans customs and rivaled white ladies in their own

boxes on the balconies of the Orleans Theatre wearing “diamonds, Parisian head-dresses, and elegant toiles; and of the tropical splendor with which they shone at their weekly balls” (342). King insinuates that this new wave of *gens de couleur libres* helped elevate the existing social standings of the quadroon women in New Orleans and perhaps helped develop the culture for which they then became famous, including the Quadroon Ball milieu in New Orleans.

Turning her attention to quadroon balls, King echoes what is often said of them, that they divided the week from those thrown for the white ladies, only white men were allowed to attend, and visitors loved to experience this scene that no other city could offer. King unabashedly addresses white men’s fondness of the quadroon balls, alluding also to current behavior, when she slyly remarks on Robin’s remarks, “Robin, in 1804, remarked slyly, *as we have seen* [italicized for emphasis], that the gentlemen of New Orleans society were fond of seeking distractions elsewhere than in their own sphere” (343). The well-known account of visitor Duke of Saxe-Weimar’s description of quadroon balls is iterated here as well, in which he compares his experience between the white and quadroon balls, both paraphrased and quoted, King explains here:

He writes, that the quadroon women who frequented these balls appeared almost white and that from their skins no one would detect their origin; they dressed well and gracefully, conducted themselves with perfect propriety and modesty, and were all the time under the eyes of their mothers. Some of them possessed handsome fortunes, but their position in the community was most humiliating. They regarded negroes and mulattoes with unmixed contempt (344)



As a foreigner, Saxe-Weimer considers himself an outsider experiencing the quadroon flavor, very much like the situation in which Kristian Koppig finds himself at the beginning of *Tite Poulette*. Just like Koppig, Saxe-Weimer acknowledges that the women could pass for white based on the color of their skin, as well as their social presence, propriety, and sometimes wealth. Despite these praises, quadroon women still held a 'most humiliating' position in the community and it seems that the Duke cannot see past their racially mixed background. In bringing up the relations and treatment between quadroons and 'negroes and mulattoes,' the Duke's tone implies judgment, which is ironic since he is imparting his own judgment and opinions on the racial caste of quadroons.

Saxe-Weimer's helps exemplify the strange position quadroons found themselves in, straddling the world between two races without the capacity to embrace either as well as how free people of color were scrutinized by whites. Interestingly, King connects the quadroon's experience with these balls to those of the slave marts and Voodoo dances that are described in depth earlier in this chapter and she insists, "Those brilliant balls, in their way, are as incredible now as the slave marts and the Voudou dances; which, in their way, they seem subtly, indissolubly connected with" (344). In this breadth, Grace King places the quadroon experience on the same platform as those varying on the racial caste scale. This association helps illustrate that despite personal opinions and life experiences, one cannot escape the association of the black experience, like voodoo and slave markets, even if one looks 'almost white' and engages in the same social sphere as 'gentlemen.' King recognizes that despite the quadroon women's attempt to distance from their African ancestors, socially they would always be associated.

One of the most unique contributions to Grace King's *The Place and the People* is the inclusion of an excerpt from Charles Gayarré, notable Louisiana historian whose life spanned the nineteenth century from 1805-1895. This excerpt from an unpublished manuscript contains an in depth description of the lifestyle of *gens de couleur libres* men. King preemptively describes them as the opposite of their female counterparts, "retiring, modest, and industrious" (344). Within Gayarré's excerpt, he specifically points towards the actions and qualities of quadroon men and how their life fit into the social atmosphere in New Orleans, offering specific examples and variations of experiences. Throughout my research, there's seldom mention of quadroon men's existence in the nineteenth century, even though information on quadroon women is comparatively abundant. Gayarre's account helps expound upon what has been previously mentioned or insinuated in off handed descriptions.

In Gayarré's account, it confirms that by 1830, some free men obtained enough wealth to own cotton and sugar plantations with slaves. Besides fortune, *gens de couleur libres* held positions in scientific and literary circles, as well as notable musicians, merchants, and money and real estate brokers. In "humbler classes," the vocations ranged from mechanics, shoemakers, barbers, tailors, carpenters, and upholsters. Gayarré comments that most were educated in France and expresses surprise that few settle there permanently, where "there was no prejudice against their origin" (345), however, the *gens de couleur libres* would reply, " 'It is hard for one who has once tasted the Mississippi to keep away from it' " (345). Gayarré's goes into more depth specifically regarding quadroons' complex relationship with Louisiana but at this point, he establishes

the respectable and contributing members of society that is represented in the *gens de couleur* class.

Gayarré ruminates on the position of quadroons within New Orleans society, first focusing on men and then women, specifically middle-aged quadroon women, another social group that does not get much attention. In these passages, Gayarré covers topics that have largely been left out of New Orleans history and remembrances. Gayarré gives a lengthy description of his interpretation of quadroon men within the New Orleans community. On this topic, he acknowledges their lofty place within society and admires their good nature demeanors but simultaneously, again, debases their treatment of black men. This is one of the few largely dedicated descriptions to men of this social status, it begins with commentary on their general demeanor, their position in New Orleans, their treatment of those below them in the racial caste system, to their interactions with their family:

The quadroons of Louisiana have always shown a strong local attachment although in the state they were subjected to grievances, which seemed to them unjust, if not cruel. It is true, they possessed many of the civil and legal rights enjoyed by the whites, as to the protection of person and property; but they were disqualified from political rights and social equality. But...it is always to be remembered that in their contact with white men, they did not assume that creeping posture of debasement – nor did the whites expect it – which has more or less been forced upon them in fiction. In fact, their handsome, good-natured faces seem almost incapable of despair. It is true the whites were superior to them, but they, in their

turn, were superior, and infinitely superior, to the blacks, and had as much objection to associating with the blacks on terms of equality as any white man could have to associating with them.

In these descriptions, we can come to understand the attitude of a prominent white man of the time and his understanding of a successful quadroon man and his way of life. Gayarré walks through the different levels of racism based on this caste system and insists that white men did not expect quadroons to behave as lower class citizens, as it is ‘forced upon them in fiction.’ It is ironic this is said in the same thought when he blatantly acknowledges that quadroons did not have political rights or social equality, white men were effectively in control at this time and if their lesser treatment of quadroons was purely fictionalized then there would be no political or social discrepancy between these two racial groups. Instead, Gayarré calls to attention, again, the treatment between quadroons and blacks, condemning the way in which quadroons behaved superiorly and scoffs that it was worse than whites’ supremacy over the mixed races. However, it seems apparent that quadroons embraced the white culture forced upon all Africans on their arrival to Louisiana and grasped at the illusion of being incorporated into their sphere. While quadroons lived straddled between these racial lines, rejecting their African heritage and striving to fit the mold of the white world, both quadroon men and women had to follow the expectations and allowances put forth by the white man.

While this allowed for relative freedom compared to blacks, quadroon men had to allow the practice of placage and adhered to the rules put forth to them. For instance, it was widely accepted that quadroon men were not allowed to attend quadroon balls, where white men would eagerly attend to meet and potentially court quadroon and octoroon

women. Furthermore, when white men would begin the practice of placage and visit the home of the placee, quadroon men would make themselves scarce – accepting their presence was not welcome. Gayrré acknowledges these strict social enforcements on quadroon men's roles in New Orleans at the time, saying, "They were not admitted to the quadroon balls, and when white gentlemen visited their families it was the accepted etiquette for them never to be present" (346). These social stipulations made it clear that white men did not want to compete or associate with quadroon men in the same romantic sphere and quadroons' complied. These practices and the distinct separation helps illustrate the ways in which white men would separate themselves and lower the social status of quadroons, despite the apparent wish to establish relations with quadroon women. This also re-enforces the racial hierarchy that the whiter one's skin, the more social power that can be gained.

As this practice continued in New Orleans, quadroon women looked more and more to depend on white men in this way, and in turn disassociated themselves with men of their own race. Grace King describes this phenomenon with little surprise, claiming that the quadroon women's actions follow the natural desires of all women,

The desire of distinction, to rise from a lower level to social equality with a superior race, was implanted in the heart of the quadroon, as in that of all women. Hence an aversion on their part to marrying men of their own colour, and hence their relaxation and deviation from, if not their complete denial of, the code of morality accepted by white women, and their consequent adoption of a separate standard of morals for themselves, and

the forcing it upon the community and upon the men of their own colour  
(347-348)

King continues to speak about the quadroon woman's experience as though she has lived it first hand, although this is impossible, and at times takes a judgmental point of view regarding these women,

Assuming as a merit and a distinction what is universally considered in the civilized world a shame and disgrace of their sex, their training of their daughters had but one end in view. Unscrupulous and pitiless, by nature or circumstance, as one chooses to view it, and secretly still claiming the racial license of Africa, they were, in regard to family purity, domestic peace, and household dignity, *the most insidious and deadliest foes a community ever possessed* [italics added for emphasis] (348).

King seems to be penalizing quadroon women for the position that is thrust upon them by the white community. Quadroons have no other way of elevating themselves or their future children to be equals in the eyes of the white world, and as King says, "The great ambition of the unmarried quadroon mothers was to have their children pass for whites, and so get access to the privileged class. To reach this end, there was nothing they would not attempt, no sacrifice they would not make" (348). There is almost no criticism of the white male's role in this perpetuated practice, although in reality, they are to blame for the systematic racial roles fixed within society at this time.

The middle-aged quadroon woman found herself in a strange position. By this time in her life, it was most likely that she has had and been abandoned by her prominent white male suitor and has been left with children. Often, mistresses were left with

property or a sum of money paid either annually or in one lump to help adjust to life without their spouse. Gayarré does not acknowledge the precarious situations in which quadroon women often found themselves, but paid much attention to their current place in society. He describes a comfortable and easy existence with plenty of work found in seamstress positions and renting rooms to wealthy white men. It's clear that quadroon women continued to rely on the wealth of white men, however, in their older age, this connection is linked to domestic services as opposed to romantic, as Gayarré describes, "Many of them made a specialty of making fine linen shirts worn at that day by gentlemen and were paid two dollars and a half apiece for them, at which rate of profit a quadroon woman could always earn an honest, comfortable living" (347). He goes on to praise their diligence as landladies, always providing a hot cup of coffee in the morning and a bowl of fresh water and sweet smelling towels at night. And again, Gayarré admires the countenance of this race,

They were both menials and friends, and always affable and anxious to please. A cross one would have been a phenomenon. If their tenants fell ill, the old quadroons and, under their direction, the young ones, were the best and kindest of nurses. Many of them, particularly those who came from St. Domingo, were expert in the treatment of yellow fever. Their honesty was proverbial (347)

Gayarré's commentary on quadroons and their efficiency as nurses, especially regarding yellow fever, is interesting to note seeing as Cable employs this bit of information within a very important facet in his short story, *Tite Poulette*. However, as seen in the quotes aforementioned, Grace King did not hold such a high view of quadroon women at this

time and Gayarré's passage alongside King's help illustrate the difference in views between white men and white women at the time.

Grace King's extensive examination of this caste is rooted in the interest of the founding of the Sisters of the Holy Family, a religious safe haven created by quadroons for quadroons, and it is clear that this is where King's respect for the race lies, "It was in 1842, in the very heyday of the brilliant, unwholesome notoriety of the quadroon women, that the congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family was founded" (348). King offers a brief history of the founders and their mission, insinuating that they wanted to help quadroon women escape this legalized system of prostitution that they have been born into. After the civil war, the sisters became a stronghold in their racial community and had established a school, two branch houses, and an orphanage. King notes that by 1881, The Sisters of the Holy Family occupy the Orleans street ballroom as a convent, once known for its quadroon balls, it was now under control of quadroon women. However, King does not acknowledge Thomy Lafon, who bought the ballroom, a prominent figure in the free people of color community and a staunch advocate for racial equality. It is remarkable that the Orleans ballroom fell under control of free people of color, a powerfully symbolic gesture to show the resilience of their race during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in New Orleans.

### **CHAPTER 3: George Washington Cable and his Foreword to *'Tite Poulette***

George Washington Cable wished to highlight the immoralities within quadroon balls, naming the quadroon as a key component to perpetuating this sin with no mark on their conscience, it is imperative to consider Cable's own lifestyle choices and mentality.



Born and raised in New Orleans, Cable was a pious man with a strong moral conscience and “austerely Presbyterian,” as noted by Edward Larocque Tinker in “Cable and the Creoles,” his forward to *Old Creole Days*. Cable’s staunch religious foundations is due to his mother who bitterly remembered her late husband and his failed fortunes and business plans, one of which included a ‘saloon and wine store.’ As a result, in order to ensure that her children did not follow the same downward trajectory, Tinker remarks, “she saw to it that they were raised in the strictest Presbyterian orthodoxy to believe that industry was a duty, indolence a depravity, honesty a necessity, drink a curse, and that the theatre and dancing were but devils’ traps to damn their souls to eternity” (viii). By the time Cable was born in 1844, the quadroon phenomenon had swept the city and became a faceted part of New Orleans culture.

Once Cable began to find himself as a writer, it didn’t take long for him to find his niche to produce realistic depictions of life in New Orleans, which soon became popular in the North and widely disapproved in the South. Cable’s steadfastly realistic approach to the novel was truly his own since he did not indulge in reading novels himself and believed many to be frivolous. Tinker reasons that the Northerners became drawn to Cable’s stories about this vibrant city because of the sympathetic point of view towards the ‘Negro,’ specifically Tinker states that:

It was natural for the abolitionist Yankees to applaud *implied criticism* [italicized for emphasis] – especially if made by a Southerner – of the treatment of Negro slaves. They were particularly interested in Cable’s exposition of the tragic consequences of miscegenation as typified in his character, ‘Tite Poulette,’ whose octoroon mother made a gallant but

pathetic fight to preserve her daughter's virtue in defiance of a social order that doomed her to a practically inevitable concubinage (x)

Miscegenation is a word invented in New York City in 1863, which made its debut in a pamphlet promoting interracial marriage. While Edward Larocque Tinker is undoubtedly well versed in Cable's life and works, his suggested 'implied criticism' and sympathy to the octoroon in '*Tite Poulette* is not strongly founded and more aptly, Cable frowned upon the institutions these women helped to perpetuate, and it was the allure of this world, which Cable so disagreed with, that helped fuel its popularity. In response to '*Tite Poulette*, one British man lamented "if the octoroon mothers were half as alluring and virtuous as Cable depicted them, he, for one, regretted the abolition of a social order that produced such unusual character" (Tinker, xi). And it is this unusual character, Madame John, and her apparent effects on society that Cable took issue with, and rather than allowing for this system to continue and perhaps become infectious, Cable promoted interracial marriage to maintain better social order.

Often, critics reflect contemporary attitudes when interpreting and analyzing the position of a piece of literature. This seems to largely be the case with Cable's '*Tite Poulette* when Tinker explains that Cable is forwarding racial equality because of the honesty in which he depicts the diverse race of characters in his stories. Cable's literary style is to depict situations as realistically as possible and to portray creole New Orleans without the representation of the free people of color population would have proved impossible and inaccurate. In Benjamin W. Farley's article, "George W. Cable: Presbyterian Romancer, Reformer, Bible Teacher," he describes Cable's mindset while writing '*Tite Poulette* explaining, "Although first published in 1874, it displays Cable's

developing attitude toward the race question...In portraying their lot [Madame John and 'Tite Poulette], Cable's sabbatarian judgments are aroused, but they are accompanied with sympathy for the pair" (174). Farley's analysis helps bridge the polarizing themes in *'Tite Poulette*, on one hand we feel compassion for the two women but on the other, Cable invokes the immoral consequences surrounding their existence that Cable associates with Creoles: "Cable also inherited a strong sense of the Protestant work ethic from his mother, coupled with an Anglo-Saxon attitude of benign superiority. The latter is most visible in his Creole stories...Cable defined the creoles as 'the French-speaking, native, ruling class' and found them woefully lacking the moral virtues he prized" (169). At the time when Cable wrote *'Tite Poulette*, the impact of this other-worldly lifestyle that did not exist anywhere else in America, or the world, would have shocked and intrigued readers to gain a better understanding into the inner workings of the New Orleans' scandalous social scene.

Farley also helps contextualize Cable's religious beliefs by explaining how Protestantism, at the time, coincided with the ideology of Anglo-Saxon superiority. Benjamin Palmer served as the local pastor at Pyrtania Street Presbyterian Church where George Washington Cable attended his sermon every Sunday from 1865-1884 and claims, "I have never left him [Palmer] and felt unimproved in my head and heart. I should say, I have always left his church with new resolves and clear faith" (Farley, 170). On examination of Palmer's sermons, it becomes quite clear that he reinforced the ideology of white supremacy. Farley provides an excerpt from one of Palmer's sermons that helps illustrate this belief:

In all instances where the Caucasian stock has crossed with others – as when the Latin families, with a feebler instinct of race, have intermingled... - the result has been the production of a stock inferior in quality . . . The Anglo-Saxon stock, on the contrary, through all times jealous of its purity of blood and refusing to debase it by intermingling with inferior races, has preserved its power and to this day dominates cast empires in which it has planted its banner. These are stubborn facts (171)

Palmer's message encourages those to feel superior for being born into the position of a white man or woman and exploits the social troubles of interracial people by aligning them with intrinsic inferiority. While Cable's views on the subject of race eventually evolved to better reflect the sympathetic tones in *'Tite Poulette*, it was not until 1885 when he wrote "The Freedman's Case in Equity," that he became an advocate for race equity. This comes after Cable's move to the North and a book tour with Mark Twain around the United States, dubbed as *The Twins of Genius*. Similarly to Cable, Twain's representation of the African American in his literature answers to mixed critiques because of the stereotypical representations of his black characters.

However, Cable himself allows for a deeper perspective to *'Tite Poulette* in his own foreword, especially when he states that the quadroons found this system, "honorable in every way." In concluding that quadroons found this system 'honorable in every way,' Cable immediately repositions the intentions of this story. With this position, Cable does not offer sympathy for the quadroon woman and her position but rather would like to portray a stark understanding of the complex social situations only to be found within the city of New Orleans. Interestingly enough, this foreword was never used

according to a note written in the top left corner that states, “Do not use. Story explains itself.” There has also been no previous mention of this foreword in any previous scholarship on George Washington Cable, or ‘*Tite Poulette*. The contents of the foreword and the remembered reception of Cable’s story do not quite align. Only under the guise of religious salvation does Cable acknowledge a positive momentum of the free person of color’s position in New Orleans. As deciphered below, Cable’s foreword hits on every point in Tinker’s description of Cable’s religious values instilled from his mother:

One must remember that at the time the scenes of this story were laid, the marriage between whites and colored was forbidden by law, there was no law legal or social, strong enough to prevent a quadroon from being the mistress of a white man.

And among the quadroons this position was considered honorable in every way. The famous quadroon balls fed this custom.

Only the loveliest of the quadroons – and some of them were very beautiful – attended these balls, and here the young gallants of the day came looking for romance – and found, incidentally, many a duel.

The story of ‘*Tite Poulette* is founded upon these social conditions, which were finally abolished by the mothers, wives, and sweethearts of the men, for they felt strongly and had suffered keenly as a result of the lure of these forbidden pleasures.

Then it was that the ladies of New Orleans converted the Salle d’Orleans – called in the story Rue Salle de Conde – into a convent for colored nuns whose work it is to aid young negro girls (Cable)

Now, looking at the foreword segment by segment, it is explicitly clear that Cable's intention is not to call attention to the "doom of her inevitable concubinage," but rather that Cable believed that quadroon women found no fault in the system of placage and going further in calling it "honorable" to them. This directly implies that the quadroon did not have issue with her place and position in quadroon balls, and as a result, quadroon balls continue to feed the custom of white men taking a mistress and all of the consequences of this action. One consequence being the duels that inevitably resulted from them, undoubtedly fueled from the heavy drinking that also characterized these events as well as winning as a suitor. As Cable writes, "one must remember... marriage between whites and colored was forbidden by law," here Cable refers to the then current law that allowed for interracial marriages enacted in 1868 and later turned over in 1888. Cable cites that with or without this law, time has shown there is nothing to prevent the alliance between quadroon women and the white man.

In the fourth segment, Cable calls attention to the party that he feels has been treated most unjustly by quadroon balls and that is white women, or as Cable says – the mothers, wives, and sweethearts of the men – and as only white men could attend these balls, their mothers must be white, their wives had to be white at this time, and potentially sweethearts could be up for debate, but if allowed in the ball, then they would not be also be categorized as 'suffering.' Finally, he commends white women with improper acknowledgment that they converted the Salle D'Orleans into a convent for colored nuns. Perhaps Cable gives recognition to the ladies of New Orleans rather than Thomy Lafon, the free man of color who helped establish many schools and churches in New Orleans, because of the tireless battle in which the "ladies of New Orleans" raged

to end quadroon balls. Regardless, he is still misappropriating the achievement of free people of color in New Orleans. However, his acknowledgment of this movement of free people of color embracing religion is positive. Cable also feels that the religious construct of marriage will help to point quadroons to a more moral existence rather than what was considered honorable in placage. In forwarding this ideology, his logic echoes that of Grace King's account of quadroon women in her book, *New Orleans: The Place and the People*, when King also wildly reviled quadroon women associating with white men romantically but praised their interest in religion. Both Grace King and George Washington Cable felt wildly uncomfortable with the idea that white women should compete with those of mixed race.

In '*Tite Poulette*, Cable's purpose in Madame John's character is to help forward the immoral actions surrounding the social climate of New Orleans and implicating the quadroon woman's role in this. As seen in many accounts and descriptions of quadroon women and their place within society, it is often remarked on their cruel treatment of those below themselves in the racial caste system. In my extensive research, there has not been one account of a Southern, or Northern for that matter, white male or female who is empathetic to the precarious position quadroons find themselves in society as a direct result from the white man's actions and laws and their own interest in perpetuating the quadroon ball. There is no blame implicating the white man, immorality is always associated with the quadroon. It is important to remember, at the time Cable wrote this story, interracial marriage was legal in New Orleans.

This story shows that Cable was a proponent of this law, otherwise the quadroon existence forces both white men and quadroon women to live an immoral life and for

white women to suffer the consequences. When interracial marriage became legal in 1868, there became less demand for quadroon balls and less tolerance for the ‘bad’ behavior surrounding it. Consequently, placage became superfluous now that this social contract could be substituted with a legal binding marriage, and undoubtedly weeded out white men looking for a short-term prospect. By this time, the Sisters of the Holy Family had long become an establishment within New Orleans’ as a religious safe haven created by quadroons for quadroons. Like Grace King, Cable seems to be much more comfortable with quadroons and other free people of color creating their social foundations within a religious sphere, rather than competing with them in a romantic one.

#### **CHAPTER 4: Analysis of ‘Tite Poulette**

This thesis will propose an alternate reading of Cable’s *‘Tite Poulette* as a story that is in fact not intended to promote equality amongst races. It will argue that, to the contrary, Cable wishes to enlighten New Orleanians about the immoral associations connected with a widely accepted former social practice to become more aware of the past’s ramifications and serve as an example of how race relations could quickly undermine the institutions of white women and legal marriage to those around the United States. It’s often assumed that *‘Tite Poulette* takes place during the time in which it was written, 1874, as James Robert Payne cites in his article, “New South Narratives of Freedom” that, “as in many of his early short stories, at the opening of *‘Tite Poulette,*’ the time plane of the story’s composition, New Orleans in the early 1870s, toward the end of Reconstruction” (4). However, a few indications within the text suggest it is in fact set



much earlier, around the beginning of the nineteenth century following the Louisiana Purchase. The first early indication is the phrase Cable uses, “*In the good old times* [italics added for emphasis] of duels, and bagatelle-clubs, and theatre-balls, and Cayetano’s circus...” (24). Louisiana writers, and also in conversation, often used the phrase, ‘good old times,’ to recall the social environment before the Louisiana Purchase when the French still governed New Orleans.

In this sense, Cable employs the phrase facetiously since he wholeheartedly condoned duels, clubs, and ball life and these are leftover French influences. Furthermore, as it is known that Cable is a very literal man, the reference to Cayetano’s circus can date the setting in 1816-1817, as that is when his circus toured New Orleans before it closed due to an outbreak of yellow fever and his own death. Incidentally, this allows Cable to examine the impact of France’s lax racial and social ideology at the turn of the century. This is a crucial detail because setting it early in the nineteenth century reflects more on how this social practice became accepted, established, and ingrained into the city of New Orleans. While investigating the complex relationships of interracial people, Cable ends up reinforcing stereotypes rather than breaking them.

Kristian Koppig serves as a typical European man with a moral conscience, who attempts to navigate the complex social atmosphere in New Orleans during the early formation of quadroon balls. Cable marks him as one of many in his position, “He was one of that army of gentlemen who, after the purchase of Louisiana, swarmed from all parts of the commercial world...and settled down in New Orleans to pick up their fortunes, with the diligence of hungry pigeons” (23). From the perspective of Kristian Koppig, Cable recreates the position a prominent white man inevitably found himself in

when faced with the alluring graces of a quadroon in New Orleans and uniquely, Koppig is one who wishes to do what's noble. Cable represents the echelons of the racial caste system in the characters of Madame John and 'Tite Poulette. Madame John is a quadroon woman meaning she is racially composed of three quarters white blood and one quarter black blood, as Cable distinctly remarks when introducing her character, "You would hardly have thought of her being 'colored'" except for "that vivid black eye so peculiar to her kind." (24). Her daughter, 'Tite Poulette, would be classified as an octoroon meaning she has seven-eighths white blood and one-eighth black. Often, one would not be able to tell quadroons and octoroons based on the color of their skin but rather from the social freedoms associated in their daily existence.

'Tite Poulette's light complexion is acknowledged in various ways throughout the story and is an advantage for her to escape the quadroon existence. When she walks through her neighborhood, Cable describes the scene of on looking admirers: "There would be lifting of arms, wringing of fingers, rolling of eyes, rounding of mouths, gaspings and claspings of hands. 'So beautiful, beautiful, beautiful! White? – white like a water lily! White – like a magnolia!" (24). This brief passage demonstrates that the men of New Orleans did not care much about whether or not 'Tite Poulette was considered "white" on the racial caste system, simply, she's compared to a water lily or magnolia, both flowers inherent in Louisiana and this helps indicate she is 'white' in a way characteristic to Louisiana. In short, whether white or not, she is a beautiful woman by Creole standards: "The instant she was gone every tongue was let slip on the marvel of her beauty; but, though theirs were only the loose New Orleans morals of over fifty years ago, their unleashed tongues never had attempted any greater liberty than to take up the

pet name, ‘Tite Poulette’ (26). Her beauty is widely and frequently acknowledged throughout the story and since her race is ambiguous – is she white or is she an octoroon? – the men of New Orleans show restraint and respect toward ‘Tite Poulette that would not be given to black women of the time.

Cable offers two different viewpoints of how a quadroon woman could consider their social positions, ‘Tite Poulette defaults to the justification of God just whereas Madame John succumbs to the weight of the precarious position of her race. This arises concern from her mother out of fear for her future well-being, seen when Madame John says to ‘Tite Poulette one night, “Ah! My child, I see not how you are to meet the future...Ah! You are not like others; no fortune, no pleasure, no friend” (29). Cable accurately depicts the harrowing struggle that these women found themselves in during the 19<sup>th</sup> century when racial identity began to constrict as New Orleans became more integrated into American ideals. The only option to gain social and monetary prominence for a free woman of color was to rely on the assistance of wealthy white men. Madame John laments on their precarious racial position and wish they could belong to either the black or the white world instead of existing in between: “There is no place in this world for us poor women. I wish that we were either white or black!” (29). However, ‘Tite Poulette does not join Madame John in this lamentation, instead she invokes God’s grace and justifies their existence with simply stating, “God made us. He made us just as we are; not more white, not more black” (29). Due to her inherent moral compass, ‘Tite Poulette doesn’t dare take the guise of a white woman and also refuses to take the typical path of a free woman of color.

Zalli, formally known as Madame John in the story, depicts the immoral temptations surrounding the female quadroon existence. This is represented in her desperate desire for her daughter to be provided for and taking advantage of Kristian Koppig's growing infatuation with her daughter. It is also depicted in her own position as a dancer for the Rue Salle de Condé. This wish to align her daughter with a white man, as previously noted has been echoed Grace King as well as other academics, was the utmost desire of quadroon mothers and should be of little surprise considering the debasing treatment of people of color in America. Cable provides Madame John with transparency in upholding these desires when she cries, "But if we were only *real white!* – both of us; so that some gentleman might come to me and say 'Madame John, I want your pretty little chick. She is so beautiful. I want to take her home. She is so good – I want her to be my wife.' Oh, my child, my child, to see that I would give my life – I would give my soul!" (29). In this sense, Cable offers this story as a showcase of the social conditions when Quadroon Balls flourished not only allowed for immoral behavior to prevail but also allowed the opportunity for quadroon and octoroon women to escape their race, one of the ultimate goals for the quadroon as cited by white scholars. As a distinguished outsider to New Orleans society, Kristian Koppig becomes an easy target to Madame John to allow her daughter to pass into white society.

Despite that both 'Tite Poulette and Kristian admit that an interracial union is recognizably wrong, albeit in different ways, Madame John does not quell her quest to unite the pair. When Madame John continues to suggest to 'Tite Poulette to pursue a suitor by noting that many gentlemen at the ball ask after her, and how she recently overheard two men tenderly discussing her in the street, 'Tite Poulette's reaction upholds

her undesired union: “‘Tite Poulette’s eyes flashed fire...the daughter’s face was thrown into the mother’s lap, not so well satisfied, now, with God’s handiwork” (30). This helps illustrate Cable’s motive to create a contrast between a quadroon striving to live a religious life, and one who wishes to pursue a social life like that of a white woman.

On the heels of this conversation, Madame John’s true intentions and hopes for her daughter become revealed. She does not aspire for ‘Tite Poulette to simply have only a provider but would rather her have the opportunity to escape her race and marry legally. To fully illustrate the dichotomy between ‘Tite Poulette’s morality and Madame John’s immorality, the full conversation regarding marriage is provided:

“‘Tite Poulette, I want you to promise me one thing.”

“Well, *maman?*”

“If any gentleman should ever love you and ask you to marry – not knowing, you know – promise me you will not tell him you are not white.”

“It can never be,” said ‘Tite Poulette.

“But if it should,” said Madame John pleadingly.

“And break the law?” asked ‘Tite Poulette, impatiently.

“But the law is unjust,” said the mother.

“But it is the law!”

“But you will not, dearie, will you?”

“I would surely tell him!” said the daughter.

Within this excerpt, Madame John is asking ‘Tite Poulette to promise that she would break the law, pass herself off as white, and establish a religious and legal union under

false pretenses. 'Tite Poulette outwardly refuses this hypothetical opportunity. This establishes 'Tite Poulette's initial stance on quadroons' place in society as God and law abiding citizens and that individualistic aspirations and self interests do not have more authority than the laws of the white man. On the other hand, for Madame John, it shows the lack of regard for authority and institutions in order to be a proponent of one's own best self-interests.

Madame John's own pursuit of personal agenda is evident through her current social position and how it reflects choices made in her past. The social elevation through her former alliance with Mister John is still recognized more than fifteen years after his death, as she is referred to as "Madame John," throughout the entirety of the short story until Cable introduces her real name, "Zalli," from a flashback to Monsieur John's last moments. Her alliance to Mister John represents much of the jovial and more relaxed social governing around at the turn of the century, before the more defined contracts of 'placage' and the term 'quadroon ball.' However, the description of their experience outlines the very characteristics that become perpetuated and abused under American governing. Madame John fondly recalls her younger days with Monsieur John and describes them as such:

To Zalli, of course, as to all "quadroon ladies," the festivities of the Conde Street ball-room were familiar of old. There in the happy days when dear Monsieur John was young, and the eighteenth century old, she has often repaired under guard of her mother – dead now, alas! – and Monsieur John would slip away from the full play and dry society of Théâtre d'Orléans, and come around with his crowd of elegant friends...No man of

questionable blood dare set his foot within the door. Many noble gentlemen were pleased to dance with her. Colonel De ---- and General La ---: city councilman and officers from the Government House. There were no paid dancers than. Everything was decorously conducted indeed! Every girl's mother was there, and the more discreet always left before there was too much drinking. Yes, it was gay, gay! – but sometimes dangerous. Ha! More times than a few had Monsieur John knocked down some long-haired and long-knifed rowdt, and kicked the breath out of him for looking saucily at her; but that was like him, he was so brave and kind; - and he is gone!

*'And the eighteenth century old,'* demonstrates another instance when Cable informs the reader of the time period during which this story takes place. This excerpt in particular allows for Cable's view of how quadroons found their participation in quadron balls as 'honorable in every way,' to quote Cable himself. With great enthusiasm, Madame John ticks off the characteristics infamously revered about quadron balls.

First, Monsieur John would sneak away from the white soirees in order to attend the mixed race ones. Next, as noted in evidence of Claiborne attending all sorts of New Orleans' balls during his reign of supervising the transition of power from France to the U.S., many distinguished men of the military and government attended these balls, establishing this intermingling of races acceptable in the highest social classes. Of course, Madame John concedes, there was a fair amount of alcohol-fueled debauchery and fighting but her tone is unapologetic and reflects longing for old times. At the end of her time with Monsieur John, on his deathbed, he bequeathed his house to Zalli, Cable writes,

“it is for you and the little one” (25). Presumably, this is where ‘Tite Poulette’s name originates, and this was also considered common practice between a white man and his quadroon mistress. Many years after his deathbed, both Madame John and ‘Tite Poulette are identified in their association with Monsieur John, acknowledging that these unions were steadfastly recognized in New Orleans society. Cable’s realistic fictional account also considers work a quadroon woman must do in her middle age, so when Madame John’s funds from her inherited house are lost in a failed bank, she is forced to work as a yellow-fever nurse and as a paid dancer.

Monsieur and Madame John’s alliance leads Kristian Koppig to assume ‘Tite Poulette’s mixed race identity. Koppig makes an inquiry to the local wigmaker regarding Madame John’s past assumingly to discover more information about ‘Tite Poulette: “‘Why, you know! – she was’ said the wig-maker at the corner to Kristian Kippig – ‘I’ll tell you. You know? – she was’ – and the rest atomized off in a rasping whisper. She was the best yellow-fever nurse in a thousand yards round; but that is not what the wig-maker said” (25). The way in which Cable phrases the wig-maker’s response shows two important facets regarding quadroons at the time; one is that their position was risqué due to the whispering and gossipy nature of the conversation; and the other is that the answer of ‘who’ a quadroon is complex and could be answered in various ways. However, the takeaway is that when it comes to the “who is” for quadroon women, their past unions define their identity.

Despite her mixed race, Kristian Koppig admires ‘Tite Poulette and his fascination soon turns into romantic feelings. As it is first highlighted in his letters to his mother, he acknowledges the peculiar position of a quadroon woman and the obvious



attention reaped upon them, “How they did chatter over her. Quiet Kristian Koppig had never seen the like. He wrote to his mother, and told her so” (26). Kristian Koppig’s role as an outsider helps showcase how the quadroon is an aesthetic asset to society. Cable’s purposeful repetition of men fawning over ‘Tite Poulette helps create the atmosphere of attraction in New Orleans at the time. As previously cited, quadroon women were raised specifically to flaunt their good looks and graces and Cable creates ‘Tite Poulette to be an example of walking beauty:

A pretty fellow at the corner would suddenly double himself up with beckoning to a know of chums; these would hasten up; recruits would come in two or three directions; as they reached the corner their countenances would quickly assume a genteel severity, and presently, with her mother, ‘Tite Poulette would pass – tall, straight, lithe, her great black eyes made tender by their sweeping lashes, the faintest tint of color in her Southern cheek, her form all grace, her carriage a wonder of simple dignity (26)

The amount of attention lavished on ‘Tite Poulette does not go unnoticed by Kristian Koppig and his defensiveness over ‘Tite Poulette and her mother eventually escalates too far. However, simultaneously, Cable conceits that while the Creole men gawked in the streets, they never took it further, illustrated when he writes, “though theirs were only the loose New Orleans morals of over fifty years ago, their unleashed tongues never had attempted any greater liberty than to take up the pet name, ‘Tite Poulette” (26). This shows a level of restraint amongst the men and a level of respect held particularly for quadroon women by going no further than uttering her name. Although, Cable indicates

this behavior is a remnant lingering from New Orleans' European roots by citing that this behavior has been around for fifty years. This is another indication of the proper time period in which the story takes place. This emphasis on 'Tite Poulette's admired position within her neighborhood demonstrates the cyclical existence for quadroons but also that they were considered out of reach for the average Creole man.

George Washington Cable takes issue with the position that the female quadroon demands within the New Orleans social world and their ambition to take a white suitor, despite the consequences and way of life that must be faced after this suitor is no longer around. Madame John and 'Tite Poulette help illustrate this dichotomy once Madame John takes a position as a paid dancer in order to support her and her daughter. Cable wishes to bring attention that these women existed as sexual icons in society and that continual promotion of these ideals negatively impacted many. Cable conceits that quadroon women are a product of their environment and continue the cycle passed on from their mothers when he describes that, "Madame John had been brought up tenderly, and had done what she could to rear her daughter in the same way, with of course, no more education that the ladies in society got" (27). Cable suggests that raising a quadroon woman in the same fashion as a white woman of society is improper because eventually the quadroon will be forced to be financially independent once they no longer can depend on their white suitor.

Cable's concern for the white women's proper treatment and respect in society weighs on his mind while he explores the quadroon's position in New Orleans. He puts the two in direct contrast when he writes, "They [quadroons] struggled as they could, faintly; now giving a few private dancing lessons, now dressing hair, but ever beat back

by the steady detestation of their imperious patronesses; and, by and by, for want of that priceless worldly grace known among the flippant as ‘money sense’” (27). Cable implies that as seen with Madame John, quadroons must rely on the few skills they have as beauty icons to make money but with further disdain growing on behalf of white women, these opportunities are fewer and far between. There’s also an implication here that quadroons do not have the ability to correctly manage their money, or the inherited money they receive. This is not the first time Cable alludes to this, as he mentions at the beginning of the story, “An hour after, amid the sobs of Madame John, she and the ‘little one’ inherited the house, such as it was. With the fatal caution which characterizes ignorance, she sold the property and placed the proceeds in a bank, which made haste to fail” (25). As a result, quadroon women often took up positions that may be morally degrading, such as Madame John’s dancing job. Quadroon women relied heavily on the financial assistance from white men and, in addition to white women tiring from competing with quadroons for romantic attention, they no longer wished to see their husbands, sweethearts, and sons to continue to financially support these women. However, Madame John’s staunch determination to maintain ‘Tite Poulette’s elevated social position embodies Cable’s understanding of the quadroon plight to remain relevant in the same realm as white women.

The inability to separate the quadroons and octoroons in society from the proper treatment white women deserve from their partners is subtly examined in Kristian Koppig’s next letter to his mother. In it, he contemplates ‘Tite Poulette’s strange position as a woman of mixed race that could easily pass as white while simultaneously recognizing the impropriety and admonishes the very idea of a multi-racial existence. He

writes, “I see none so fair as the poor girl who lives opposite me, and who, alas! Though so fair, is one of those whom the taint of caste has cursed...’God defend her,’ I said to-night to a fellow clerk, ‘I see no help for her.’ I know there is a natural, and I think proper, horror of mixed blood (excuse the mention, sweet mother), and I feel it, too” (30). Here, he struggles to separate his natural emotions that appeal to ‘Tite Poulette’s situation and also condemns the very idea of how her existence came about when he describes ‘horror’ as being a natural and proper reaction to mixed race. He invokes the help of God as the only answer to her situation, implicating that her predicament is one above that a man could solve. Yet, he seems to reconsider the paradigm of the situation if ‘Tite Poulette were to be placed outside of New Orleans when he writes, “and yet if she were in Holland to-day, not one of a hundred suitors would detect the hidden blemish” (30). Cable highlights that even a morally guided and affluent white man can reconsider his proprieties at the allure of a quadroon. Due to his attraction to ‘Tite Poulette, Cable shows the effect it has on Kristian’s reasoning towards one of mixed race, moving closer towards how many Creoles in New Orleans felt about quadroons. This attention does not go unnoticed by Madame John and she is able to capitalize on Kristian’s pity in order to help elevate her daughter out of her natural caste.

Madame John overheard Kristian Koppig’s conversation when he praised to God to ‘defend’ ‘Tite Poulette and she recognizes this as her opportunity to find a proper match for ‘Tite Poulette. Since ‘Tite Poulette refuses to attend quadroon balls, there is some question regarding her caste and this is highlighted in the transaction with Monsieur de la Rue, the manager of the ballroom where Zalli dances. In this interaction, Monsieur de la Rue inquires if ‘Tite Poulette is Zalli’s daughter and her initial response causes for

confusion because she clearly hesitates in her answer: “‘She – she – is my daughter,’ said Zalli, with somewhat of alarm in her face” (31). This interaction comes just after Zalli and ‘Tite Poulette’s conversation about breaking the law and hiding her true race if the opportunity arises. This is clearly why Zalli has such alarm on her face when confronted by Monsieur de la Rue about her daughter, however, he is not convinced that they are mother and daughter because ‘Tite Poulette does not accompany Madame John at the balls. To many, there are no other options foreseeable for a quadroon woman, so Monsieur de la Rue’s logic is not flawed when he asks, “convinced in his heart of hearts, by Zalli’s alarm, that she was lying. ‘But how? Why does she not come to our ball-room with you?’” (32). It is this pushy and nosey Frenchman who so eagerly wants to induct ‘Tite Poulette into the quadroon ball sphere that causes Kristian Koppig to escalate his actions towards ‘Tite Poulette.

Monsieur de la Rue takes it upon himself to further investigate ‘Tite Poulette’s situation with Madame John and to her great vexation, shows up at their house. This unwelcome call caught the attention of Kristian Koppig and he springs into action to defend ‘Tite Poulette, Cable highlights Koppig’s actions, “In going he became a little vexed with himself because he could not help hurrying. He noticed, too, that his arm holding the stair-rail trembled in a silly way, whereas he was perfectly calm” (34). Koppig springs into action with the intent on simply talking to de la Rue, however, almost immediately upon their encounter, Koppig strikes de la Rue: “‘I will go over,’ thought Kristian Koppig, ‘and ask him kindly if he is not making a mistake.’ ... and just then – pang! Came a sharp, keen sound rattling up the walls on either side of the narrow way” (35). This quick scene of action immediately causes Kristian Koppig to question

himself, his intentions, and, again, his stance regarding interracial relationships. Koppig immediately regrets the slap and Cable's feelings regarding fights of this nature shines through in Koppig's internal monologue: "what a mischief you have done. One poor woman being robbed of her bitter wages, and another – so lovely! – put to the burning shame of being the subject of a streetbrawl!" (35). Here Koppig is clearly condoning his own actions and yet does not understand the larger ramifications of his actions of starting a fight with de la Rue. He innocently only considers the gossip that he will have ignited about 'Tite Poulette and himself and quickly reexamines and dismisses his own feelings, "Oh! Kristian Koppig, why *did* you not mind your own business? Is she any thing to you? Do you love her? *Of course not!*" [italics added by Cable] (35). Again, Koppig denies the possibility of loving 'Tite Poulette because of her interracial heritage. Interestingly, Cable interjects as a narrator and notes, "the reader will eagerly admit that...his conclusion was correct" (35). Cable reinforces Koppig's reasoning that he can never love 'Tite Poulette because of her racial background.

Cable captures the plight of the quadroon cycle when Madame John continues to dance at Monsieur de la Rue's quadroon balls, albeit, after a lengthy apology from de la Rue, because the money gained is too valuable. This exchange also helps expose how white men relied on quadroon women and helps unveil the social power that they wheeled from their caste. Monsieur de la Rue grovels in order to get Madame John to dance at his ball and even admitted the situation to be entirely his fault: "He was glad no unfortunate result had followed except his having been assaulted by a ruffian...he hoped Madame John (whose wages were in hand waiting for her) would not fail to assist as usual. Lastly, and delicately put, he expressed his conviction that mademoiselle was wise

and discreet in declining to entertain gentlemen at her home” (36). This is an exchange that seems implausible for a woman of color in the United States in the 1800s but in fact, sums up the reality of the situation that white men catered to quadroon women in order to maintain the social contract between these two groups.

All of the male characters in the story repeatedly demonstrate going out of their way to associate with the quadroon women, even Krisitian Koppig, who outwardly denounces the social ties between blacks and whites, cannot seem to remove himself from associating with ‘Tite Poulette and Madame John. However, Monsieur de la Rue, as an organizer of quadroon balls, condemns Koppig’s differing approach to the quadroon situation. De la Rue escalates the previous argument between himself and Koppig when Koppig unexpectedly shows up to rescue Madame John at de la Rue’s dance. As an outsider to New Orleans, Krisitian Koppig’s ignorance of the social workings between quadroons and white men peaks at the quadroon ball scene. In tandem, Cable showcases the senseless violence that occurs as a direct consequence associated with quadroon balls. Madame John immediately recognizes the danger that Koppig is in and questions his preparedness, “‘Are you armed? No. Take this.’ She tried to slip a dirk into his hands, but he would not have it” (39). Almost immediately following this, Monsieur de la Rue and his cronies physically assault Koppig:

‘*That* for yesterday!’ cried the manager, striking fiercely with his cane.

Kristian Koppig’s fist rolled him in the dirt.

‘*That* for ‘Tite Poulette!’ cried another man dealing the Dutchman a terrible blow from behind.

‘And *that* for me!’ hissed a third, thrusting at him with something bright.

‘*That* for yesterday!’ screamed the manager, bounding like a tiger; ‘That!’  
 ‘That!’ ‘Ha!’

Then Kristian Koppig knew that he was stabbed.

‘That!’ and ‘That!’ and ‘That!’ and the poor Dutchman struck wildly here  
 and there, grasped the air, shut his eyes, staggered, reeled, fell, rose half  
 up, fell again for good, and they were kicking him and jumping on him.

All at once they scampered. Zalli had found the night-watch. (39)

The attackers make clear their reasons for the onslaught against Koppig. First, for his interference with Monsieur de la Rue’s attempts to visit Madame John and ‘Tite Poulette, then specifically in retribution for Koppig’s behavior towards ‘Tite Poulette, and finally, “for me,” the call on behalf of all the white men who abide by the practice of placage in New Orleans. In invoking these reasons, Cable makes clear that the white men of New Orleans care passionately about this particular caste and the implied social guidelines to follow. These men punish Koppig for not complying with the social precedent.

As a result of the beating, Kristian Koppig is carried straight to Madame John’s apartment even though his own residence is directly across the street. Koppig’s condition was critical and as a result, he was not cognizant of his speech although Cable writes it to be quite telling of the position Koppig finds himself in and even offers a call to action and then a warning to ‘Tite Poulette when he writes, “Come nigh, poor Woman, you have nothing to fear. Lay your strange, electric touch upon the chilly flesh; it strikes no eager mischief along the fainting veins... Yet he lives, and shall live – may live to forget you, who knows?” (40). Here, Cable assures the reader of Koppig’s condition but also in this passage is drawing to attention to the duty of Madame John and ‘Tite Poulette to care for



Koppig as women. One could also go a step further knowing that during this time, quadroon women in particular were renowned for their nursing abilities and perhaps, Cable is guiding them to their appropriate place in society. The hanging question of whether or not Koppig will live to forget ‘you’ could further imply Koppig’s trepidation of a formal connection to ‘Tite Poulette, or that the result of a formal connection could lead to abandonment if Koppig followed the predictable path of many white men of Cable’s time, which was to abruptly end the connection with their quadroon mistress in order to take a white wife.

In his injured hysteria, Koppig frankly objects to marrying ‘Tite Poulette because of her racial background, and once again, Cable brings up the question of categorizing ‘Tite Poulette’s race. Cable prefaces this hurtful moment for Madame John and ‘Tite Poulette when he says, “Even while it was taking all the two women’s strength to hold the door against Death, the sick man himself laid a grief upon them” (40). Koppig proceeds to address his mother, insinuated from Koppig’s previous correspondence with her regarding ‘Tite Poulette and her social situation, and declares, “Dear mother, fear not; trust your boy; fear nothing. I will not marry ‘Tite Poulette; I cannot. She is fair, dear mother, but ah! She is not – don’t you know, mother? Don’t you know? The race! The race! Don’t you know that she is jet black...take her away...she is jet white. Who could take a jet-white wife? O, no, no, no, no!” (40). Despite that Koppig categorizes her as both ‘jet black’ and ‘jet-white,’ the overall sentiment clearly shows that regardless of the categorization of her race, Koppig staunchly refuses to marry a woman whose race is in question. The invocation of his mother, along with the content of Koppig’s previous letters to her, implies the stance of the white woman at the time and their disapproval of

free women of color establishing relations with white men. As Cable says in his foreword, “the mothers, wives, and sweethearts” fought hard to end this social practice. It is also telling that Koppig clearly has his mother and her opinion of this type of situation in mind even while fighting to keep alive and this further demonstrates how impactful the disapproval from white women could be.

These delirious statements made by Koppig swiftly put Madame John into action. Madame John portrays the stereotypical role of a quadroon mother hoping to provide financial stability to her daughter, or better even, pass her off as white to be legally married. This wish has already been acknowledged between Madame John and ‘Tite Poulette, and the previously mentioned scholarship echoes this desire to be the utmost importance to quadroon mothers with some suggesting that they would go to any means possible to obtain this wish. It quickly becomes clear that Zalli has a plan formulating and she uses the new presence of the physician – who periodically comes to check on Koppig – and his old friendship with Monsieur John as a soundboard for the feasibility of her plan:

‘If I will let you tell me something? With pleasure, Madame John. No, and not tell anybody, Madame John. No, madame, not even ‘Tite Poulette. What?’ – a long whistle – ‘is that pos-si-ble? – and Monsieur John knew it? – encouraged it? – eh, well, eh, well! – But – can I believe you, Madame John? Oh! You have Monsieur John’s sworn statement. Ah! Very good, truly, but – you say you have it; but where is it? Ah! To-morrow!’ a skeptical shrug. ‘Pardon me, Madame John, I think perhaps, *perhaps* you are telling the truth’ (41)

Cable inserts the conversations between Zalli and the physician with only the physician's dialogue audible to the reader. This effect shows the reader the extent to which Koppig is also privy to the exchange. While the physician is clearly unsure of the sincerity of Madame John's claim, the conversation is enough for Koppig to confront Madame John with the slightest hope that perhaps 'Tite Poulette was not her own child. This conversation between Zalli and the physician is important because he could act as a testimony to her story, combined with Monsieur de la Rue's reluctance to believe that 'Tite Poulette is indeed Zalli's daughter, this sets Zalli up with two socially recognized white men to corroborate her story.

Kristian Koppig's fresh optimism on 'Tite Poulette's racial status renews his hope for a potential future together albeit briefly. In his confrontation with Madame John, Madame John gives Koppig false hope by divulging into a story about two Spaniards with yellow fever that she had taken care of once for four days straight but without success. In a vulnerable moment, Koppig asks what he hopes Madame John is setting him up to hear, if that this couple left an infant behind. Madame John's response clearly shows that she believes Koppig must know the truth, for she says, "'Ah-h-h, ha! Ha! What foolishness! Of course she is my child!' And madame gave vent to a true Frenchwoman's laugh." (42). Cable's invocation of Madame John's 'Frenchwoman' characteristics is, again, another reminder of her own racial identity and serves to remind the reader of the French influence in creating the position of quadroons in New Orleans' society. Koppig is disheartened because his hopes that 'Tite Poulette is not actually a woman of color, but a white woman he could marry without shame, is destroyed, and Cable describes his reaction to Madame John's news as follows, "It was too much for the

sick man. In the pitiful weakness of his shattered nerves he turned his face into his pillow and wept like a child” (42). Koppig’s extreme reaction illustrates the complexity of how difficult it is to navigate the issue of race, especially when faced with feelings of romance and lust.

Immediately after this show of emotions, Madame John purposely leaves Kristian Koppig and ‘Tite Poulette together. Here, we see the two fully converse for the first time in the story and Koppig switches off calling ‘Tite Poulette by her name and simply “beautiful.” He immediately begins to make romantic gestures that are not reciprocated by ‘Tite Poulette and when she outright refuses him, he delivers the ultimate gesture in asking her to be his wife: “I have struggled so hard, even to this hour, against Love, but I yield me now; I yield; I am his unconditioned prisoner forever. God forbid that I ask aught but that you will be my wife” (43). Again, ‘Tite Poulette declines but this time says because it is against the law. Immediately, Zalli interjects: “‘It is not!’ cried Zalli, seizing her round the waist and dragging her forward. ‘Take her! She is thine. I have robbed God long enough. Here are the sworn papers – here! Take her; she is as white as snow – so! Take her, kiss her; Mary be praised! I never had a child – she is the Spaniard’s daughter!’” (43). These are the final lines of *‘Tite Poulette*. Madame John has embodied the archetypal quadroon mother, she has successfully secured the future of her daughter and even further, has allowed her to escape the association of being a woman of color, and therefore have the ability to marry a white man.

Cable uses Koppig as an example of a moral man who moved to New Orleans with a predetermined notion of interracial people, but this ideology became disrupted upon meeting ‘Tite Poulette. Today, we could read this as Cable opening up the dialogue

about the unfairness of race relations; however, we must remember that at the time when he wrote this, interracial marriage was legalized in New Orleans, as well as baring in mind Cable's foreword where he notes that quadroons found nothing wrong with their situation, going as far as citing, "they found it honorable in every way." With these issues in mind, along with the racial tension and hostility of the nineteenth century especially in the city of New Orleans where quadroons' social liberties waxed and waned depending on the social climate, readers at the time would have been more struck with Koppig's disregard for his own beliefs, as well as those of his mother's – recall his letter where he apologized for even breaching the subject of interracial people – and for the ease in which Madame John concocted a story to pass 'Tite Poulette off as white. Madame John's extreme length to assure her daughter's future security and marriage to a white man demonstrates the disregard for law and propriety shown on the part of a quadroon mother. Cable's novel serves as a depiction into the lives and situations that primarily only exist in the climate of New Orleans. In doing so, he continues to perpetuate the racial stereotypes already associated with this group of free people of color.

## **CONCLUSION**

George Washington Cable published *'Tite Poulette* during a socially charged discussion of race rights in the United States, falling after the emancipation of slaves but before segregation. As one of the largest cities who at one point had an almost equal population between whites and blacks, New Orleans served as an example for interracial relations. The free people of color population, continuously fought for their equal rights throughout the nineteenth century with backlash from the white community. After the

War of 1812, where both slaves and free people of color were recruited to help fight with extreme incentive. For slaves, they were promised freedom and for free people of color, they were promised equal rewards as those of white soldiers. Unfortunately, these promises came from General Andrew Jackson and despite the staunch loyalty and hard-fought victory largely given credit to the black troops, their rewards were never granted to them. This caused outrage on the behalf of the free people of color, the only ones with any power to be able to speak out. As Daphne Spain describes in her article, "Race Relations and Residential Segregation in New Orleans: Two Centuries of Paradox," that "By 1816 such public sentiment resulted in legislation that segregated nearly every conceivable facility in New Orleans: theatres; the French Opera House; public exhibitions; Charity Hospital; public schools; restaurants and saloons" (85). The American influence in the city of New Orleans effectively not only broke their promise but revoked more social privileges for free people of color in the process.

In 1845, a collection of poetry written in French by New Orleanian free men of color was published and it is the first work published by African Americans. The collection challenges the ideas forwarded by white men revolving the precarious place of quadroons and octoroons. New Orleans free men of color expressed their opinions on the subject of quadroons through the means of jealous or hopeless love poetry in solution to the restriction for freedom of speech placed on African Americans, as well as the prohibited political criticism sanctioned by law in 1830. These poets recognized the contradiction that quadroon women were coveted by white men who felt that quadroon men have no right to them. This aroused questions such as, why would the sex of a person change the value of one's self, or as Floyd D. Cheung's "*Les Cenelles* and

Quadroon Balls: ‘Hidden Transcripts’ of Resistance and Domination in New Orleans, 1803-1845,” explains, “the poets were excluded by cruel quadroons and the system in which the latter thrived...for socially and sexually exiled men who found themselves ‘au milieu des déserts’ (‘in the middle of deserts’) between freedom and slavery, black and white” (10). *Les Cenelles* challenges white men and quadroon women’s relationship with lines like, “The glitter which surrounds you and charms your eyes/ Is only a deceptive prism which conceals death” in Lanusse’s “The Young Lady at the Ball.” Lanusse proposes this system is not an organic organism and the self-perpetuating cycle will not remain a stable option but casts death onto quadroon’s social standing. Ultimately, free men of color believed quadroon balls only existed to allow American white men to remain in control of the social system.

The free people of color launched a similar campaign to that after the War of 1812 again following the Civil War for social equality, as Spain notes that “It was just after the Federal victory that the free black population mounted sustained protests against the color barrier. In a battle that was to last fifteen years, free blacks fought all forms of public segregation: in schools (for which they paid taxes but could not let their children attend); in theatres; in hotels and in restaurants.” (87). This movement rises with the legalization of interracial marriage and the formation of three black newspapers who helped propagate these desires. This revived push for social rights led to a demonstration in 1867 to promote the desegregation of the city streetcars. This push led to a successful desegregation, as Spain explains, “The Louisiana Constitution of 1868 (known as the “black and tan” constitution due to its creation by Negroes and Republicans) wrote desegregation of public schools and accommodations into Louisiana law. Blacks attended

public schools from 1871-1877, and sometimes ate and drank in white restaurants and saloons” (88). Interestingly, and unsurprisingly, this is when the establishment of private schools increased ten fold within the city of New Orleans from 1868 to 1871 and this abundance of private schools is still visible in the city today. Unfortunately, this brief period of social equality lasted until the end of 1874, after Cable’s story was published, when a white supremacy organization overthrew the government and soon reestablished the black person’s inferior status in New Orleans (Spain, 88). This push for a renewal of social equity was very present in the daily atmosphere of New Orleans, around the same time when Cable would have been writing *‘Tite Poulette*.

In the 1890s, the social progress for equality amongst all races once again became stifled. Interracial marriage was no longer lawful and social spaces were segregated once again. This led to another act of protest led by an octroon man named Homer Adolph Plessy. Plessy refused to ride in the “colored” section of a streetcar, as another stand against the discrimination of race, seeing that Plessy was a man with only one-eighth black blood. This case ended up going to the Supreme Court and became the iconic *Plessy v. Ferguson* that launched the ruling for “separate but equal” accommodations throughout the United States. In an unfortunate outcome, the free people of color movement and social power in the city of New Orleans abruptly came to an end with a national decision on separating social facilities based on race and it was no longer just the people of New Orleans’ fight, but that of an entire country.

The immoral conditions of quadroon balls where white men would cheat on their wives, take a mistress out of wedlock, engage in violence on a regular basis, and ultimately quadroons can inaccurately portray one’s real racial identity, all with the



disregard to white women of the community who “suffered” as a result of these balls, a notable concern for Cable. Ultimately, why not allow the institution of interracial marriage to remain legal rather than promote the dubious effects of quadroon balls on white men and women. Cable captures the plights of quadroon balls and its associations through Madame John’s actions throughout *Tite Poulette* and his minute attention to the details that forced Madame John into this position, essentially depicting her as the quintessential quadroon woman and their encompassing problems. This ideology is characteristically American, as interracial marriage does not allow for the falsification of one’s race and helps to better maintain social order, and effectively allows for better oversight of racial categorization. Cable writes ‘*Tite Poulette* to serve as a reminder to the specific social conditions in New Orleans that so easily allows for a practice that is immoral for all those involved.

Black people almost reached social equality in a society where they have been intermixed and reliant on one another for almost a century, and if Cable’s aim was to promote racial equality then any one of these aforementioned demonstrations could have been a worthy subject for a short story. However, Cable decided to focus on quadroon balls, seemingly because of their effects on white women and the immoral behavior that coincided. In Cable’s presentation of interracial relations, he ended up perpetuating stereotypes created by white men and women. If Cable actually wanted to promote race equity, then he would not have written the already infamous tale of the quadroon woman with a slight twist. By then, the plight of quadroon men was known from *Les Cenelles* along with many different scenarios in the New Orleans social scene that could have parlayed into a better National discussion for interracial relations. Instead, Cable wrote a

romantic tale between a white man and an octoroon woman whose mother pushed for her social liberties but in doing so it forwarded the stereotypical negative associations with quadroon women.

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